

**Excellent Schools Detroit Testimony
Third Grade Reading
March 8, 2016**

Chairman Pavlov, Vice Chairman Knezek, and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Excellent Schools Detroit is a private, nonprofit organization created by a coalition of education, civic, community, and philanthropic organizations. Our mission is to ensure an excellent education for every Detroit child, cradle to career.

Thank you for your concern for our state's third grade readers. We would like to applaud the efforts of lawmakers on the Education Committee for prioritizing third grade reading and its connection to long term outcomes for Michigan's children. We believe that the strengths of this bill include formative assessments required three times per year in grades K-3 and delayed retention requirements until the 2019-2020 school year. However, this bill does not address kindergarten readiness or early literacy to remediate deficiencies prior to kindergarten entry.

Early Learning Investments

Low-income children enter kindergarten already a full year behind their more affluent peers. States that have successfully implemented third grade reading legislation have also passed accompanying legislation supporting early intervention. Indeed, participation in early childhood education (and, in particular, high quality early childhood education) has been shown to reduce the likelihood of grade repetition by 40% on average.¹ In Michigan, participation in the Great Start Readiness Program reduced likelihood of repetition of third grade by 46%.² This up-front early intervention can bridge the gap to school readiness and lower the likelihood (and associated cost to the state) of third grade retention a few years down the line.

Evaluative Evidence and Policy Implementation

Evidence from academic evaluations of other U.S. social promotion policies indicates that third grade retention of children reading below grade level may be associated with improved student academic achievement but no change in likelihood of high school graduation.^{3,4,5,6} The mechanism for improved academic achievement is grade retention

¹ Chase, R. and Diaz, J., 2015. Cost Savings of School Readiness Per Additional At-Risk Child in Detroit and Michigan.

² Schweinhart, L.J. et al, 2012. Michigan Great Start Readiness Program Evaluation 2012: High School Graduation and Grade Retention Findings.

³ Schwerdt, G. & West, M. R. 2013. The Effects of Test-based Retention on Student Outcomes over Time: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Florida. Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series.

itself and the associated academic interventions. As retention in later grades can be detrimental for students and since many students in other states retained in third grade would otherwise have been retained later on, a third grade retention policy may be beneficial for such students. Such policies, however, rely on provision of substantial, targeted resources and appropriations.

As Martin R. West, Harvard professor and evaluator of Florida's retention policy explains, test-based promotion policies are most successful "if they are accompanied by specific requirements that students be provided with additional, research-based instruction in reading and adequate funding to implement those requirements."⁷ Legislating supports designed to remediate and intervene with vulnerable students will be most effective (and most cost effective) when funding permits both provision of basic education and additional support of the most vulnerable students.

We cannot wait until a child is behind to intervene. Some of the provisions in HB 4822 take this approach. The use of formative assessments three times per year allows teachers to continually adjust and differentiate their instruction to their students' specific needs. The use of literacy coaches in all elementary schools and high quality professional development helps teachers to improve their practice in areas most critical to their specific students and provides students (especially those who are struggling academically) with much-needed small-group or one-on-one instruction.

⁴ Jacob, B.A. & Lefgren, L. 2004. Remedial Education and Student Achievement: A Regression-Discontinuity Analysis. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86(1): 226-244.

⁵ Schwerdt, G., West, M. R., & Winters, M.A. 2015. The Effects of Test-based Retention on Student Outcomes over Time: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Florida. NBER Working Paper 21509.

⁶ Jacob, B.A. & Lefgren, L. 2009. The Effect of Grade Retention on High School Completion. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*.1(3): 33-58.

⁷ Chiles, Nick. 2015. "As Mississippi Delivers Bad News to 5,600 Third Graders, Stressed-Out Parents Say There Must Be A Better Way." The Hechinger Report.